CLAIMS:

1.   A switching device for user data in the form of cells, the switching device comprising:-

a backplane;

a plurality of ingress means connected to an input side of the backplane;

a plurality of egress means connected to an output side of the backplane;

for each ingress means, associated slicing means for converting cells into slices for transfer across the backplane;

for each egress means, associated de-slicing means for reforming the slices into cells; and

backplane control means for controlling the backplane in accordance with control slices which are interspersed with the user data.

2.   A device according to claim 1, wherein the control slices are spaced in time.

3.   A device according to claim 1 or 2, wherein the control slices are located in predetermined timeslots.